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## Senate

The Senate met at 2 p.m., and was called to order by the Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, a Senator from the State of Delaware.

### PRAYER

The Chaplain, Dr. Barry C. Black, offered the following prayer:

Let us pray.

God, our King, You are clothed in majesty and strength. Your throne has been established from the beginning and You existed before time began.

Help our lawmakers today to do their work, striving to labor for Your glory. Give them the purity of life and honesty of purpose to walk in Your way. Lord, strengthen their heart and mind that they may worthily measure up to the role You have ordained for them. Thus, may they fulfill their vocation to the glory of Your Name and the advancement of Your kingdom.

We pray in Your sacred Name. Amen.

### PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

The Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS led the Pledge of Allegiance, as follows:

I pledge allegiance to the Flag of the United States of America and to the Republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.

### APPOINTMENT OF ACTING PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will please read a communication to the Senate from the President pro tempore (Mr. INOUE).

The legislative clerk read the following letter:

U.S. SENATE,  
PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE,  
Washington, DC, December 12, 2011.

To the Senate:

Under the provisions of rule I, paragraph 3, of the Standing Rules of the Senate, I hereby appoint the Honorable CHRISTOPHER A. COONS, a Senator from

the State of Delaware, to perform the duties of the Chair.

DANIEL K. INOUE,  
*President pro tempore.*

Mr. COONS thereupon assumed the chair as Acting President pro tempore.

### RECOGNITION OF THE MAJORITY LEADER

The ACTING PRESIDENT pro tempore. The majority leader is recognized.

### SCHEDULE

Mr. REID. Mr. President, following leader remarks, the Senate will be in a period of morning business until 4:30 this afternoon. Following morning business, the Senate will be in executive session to consider the nominations of Norman Eisen to be Ambassador to the Czech Republic and Mari Aponte to be Ambassador to El Salvador.

At 5:30 p.m. there will be at least two rollcall votes in relation to the nominations.

### NOMINATIONS

Mr. REID. Mr. President, today the Senate will vote on two nominations: those of Norman Eisen to serve as Ambassador to the Czech Republic and Maria Carmen Aponte to serve as Ambassador to El Salvador.

These two Ambassadors are in their positions as we speak, having been given recess appointments. These nominees are accomplished, qualified public servants who will continue to represent their Nation with distinction. For my Republican colleagues, however, being qualified and dedicated doesn't seem to be enough anymore. Last week, they blocked the nomination of a brilliant legal mind, Caitlin Halligan, to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia. Obviously, they don't mind there are these

vacancies because Republicans were in the majority in that court. So they wanted to defeat this competent woman, and that is what they did with these vacancies still there in that court.

They blocked the nomination of Richard Cordray to lead the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, despite his obviously deep qualifications for the job. He has a long history of protecting the middle class against unfair practices by financial predators and he would have been a great asset in our fight to protect Main Street from the kind of Wall Street greed that caused the 2008 financial crisis. Yet Republicans denied Mr. Cordray's nomination—I should say confirmation—and all it does is weaken the agency he was nominated to lead.

I hope Republicans will not turn every confirmation process into a political three-ring circus. The candidates today, Mr. Eisen and Ms. Aponte, have jumped through enough hoops already. Ms. Aponte's accomplished record as Ambassador to El Salvador over the past 15 months speaks for itself. Experts in the region from across the political spectrum support her confirmation. The same enthusiasm is there for Ambassador Eisen. If Republicans block the confirmation of these excellent, qualified candidates, it will only be for nakedly partisan reasons.

### PAYROLL TAX CUT EXTENSION

Mr. REID. Mr. President, also under partisan assault this month is a Democratic proposal to grant a \$1,000-tax decrease on working families.

Senate Republicans have blocked four proposals to protect middle-class pocketbooks. Every hour they delay and every day they filibuster is one more the Senate, by necessity, will have to stay in Washington to get its work done.

● This "bullet" symbol identifies statements or insertions which are not spoken by a Member of the Senate on the floor.



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